

Friends of Noxubee Refuge Behind the scenes MAPS event

By Greening Youth Intern Bianca Stewart

I saw the most unusual thing today, a Kentucky Warbler wearing jewelry. What's up with that and why would anyone put jewelry on a bird? I saw this bird when the Friends of Noxubee and a few participants from the Sam D. Hamilton National Wildlife Refuge went out with Dr. Scott Rush who works at the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Mississippi State University. Dr. Rush is the person who put the jewelry on the neo-tropical migratory bird as part of an ongoing effort to learn more about their survival and movement patterns. The jewelry is actually a numbered bird band used to identify individual birds. Our visit with Dr. Rush was to learn more about the process of banding birds. Banding goes hand and hand with the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Program which uses similar data from throughout the country to determine information about ecology, conservation and the management of landbird populations. This program opens the door for researchers and scientists to track any threats to the bird populations and work on solutions to dispose of the threats, and even help determine different species of birds' life spans. The morning's Behind the Scenes Event for Friends of Noxubee Refuge started out with the eagerness of seeing a bird up close while we checked each one of the ten mist nets that were placed in the woods. After checking nine of ten nets, hope was fading but as we proceeded back to the top of the hill, checking one last net we found a female Kentucky Warbler waiting on us. On close examination this particular Warbler appeared to have been already banded. The bird was then measure and weighed. On looking up the band number, our warbler was last banded three weeks earlier and Dr. Rush told us of cases of seeing some of the same birds re-caught in the same net year after year. This is pretty incredible when you remember these birds migrate each year to South American and then fly the thousand miles back to stay in the same small area of woods on the refuge. Dr. Rush described banding and the different sizes of bands used for the various species of birds, and how they check to make sure that the bands aren't too tight. After everything was checked out and good to go, we released the Warbler and watched as it flew past us and into the woods. I couldn't help but wonder how far it would go before its next encounter with the MAPS program.

